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After a time one old man will get up and close the debate by announcing in a loud voice the conclusion that has been reached. The young men have taken no part whatever in the discussion, the whole debate having taken place between the members of the first two ranks.

Position of women.

It is assumed often, on account of the dichotomy between the sexes already mentioned, that the position of women in these islands is a very inferior one. This is, however, only partially the case. It is of course true that they are not held in such high esteem as in the matrilineal islands further north. Nevertheless their position is infinitely better than among the Big Nambas who inhabit the neighbouring plateau of North Malekula. Though in the Small Islands men occasionally beat their wives and white men tell gruesome tales of ham-stringing by jealous husbands, such actions are rare and are by no means generally approved. If matters get too bad, the wife can leave and go back to her own people. If she persists in not returning and has the backing of her own relatives, these pay back the pigs the husband has given as bride-price, and she is free to marry again. But all the numerous minor pigs ceremonially presented to the wife's relatives are not paid back, so that the husband is the loser, even in pigs, and has therefore, if from this point of view only (which of course is not the only one), every inducement to make his wife's lot a contented one. During pregnancy and for some months after the birth of a child she is, moreover, carefully, almost fiercely, watched over by her own people, who at times take possession of the husband's house in order to ensure her welfare. Nor is the women's lot in the gardens too hard. Though she does indeed do most of the carrying, specially heavy loads are carried by the men, and though in the matter of time she is busy for longer periods, the heavy work of cutting down the trees, burning the scrub, and generally clearing the ground is done by men, while in the planting of the yams both share, and it is not unusual to see a husband with his wife and children all busy on the same yam-mound. At home, she feeds most of the pigs, but the most valuable tuskers are cared for by the men who are to sacrifice them. Women also have certain Lodges of their own which men may not enter, and receive complimentary titles when their menfolk perform the Maki rite.[1] They are said also even to perform a kind of secret Maki of their own.

Interior of houses. Tools and other domestic objects.

On the evening of any ordinary day, when no particular rite is in progress, the men and women, after seeing to the safety of the canoes in which they have returned from their mainland gardens, having each taken their own separate paths up from the shore and then shared the

[1] See p. 394.

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Authority of the Mother's People

According to Godefroy, during the whole of this period and during the next few months the mother's people continue at frequent intervals to invade the father's house, whence they visit the women's lodge in the exercise of their "right of inspection" over the mother and child. In the special case cited by him, when the child, in this case a girl, was about three or four months old the mother took it for a short stay in her parents' village, returning with presents of food.[1]

Henceforth "it is the mother's side of the family that exercises all authority over the children. The mother's eldest brother is in fact the legal 'father,'[2] and it is him that the children call *tete*, the word used elsewhere for 'father.'[3] The lack of social respect paid to the real father is shown by the fact that he is actually called by his own children by his personal name, not only in address, but even when his children are speaking of him to others."[4] Thus also "until he is married, a boy regards the family of the mother as his own true family. . . . When the child finds the parental scoldings irksome, he takes refuge with his mother's brother, and may even stay with him several months until his anger cools."[5] The rôle of the mother's brother in this respect is described as one of "guardianship and moderation."[6]

Special Rites with Regard to the Eldest Son

In addition to the rites described above there are two special rites connected with the birth and dedication of an eldest son. As in the more aristocratic sections of our own society in which primogeniture is a recognised institution, so also in Vao considerable emphasis is laid on the position of the eldest son. Thus, in the tale dealing with the foundation of the Vao Maki, To-wewe, the founder, was one of ten brothers, of whom he himself was the eldest.[7] The pattern of ten brothers is a common one throughout Malekula, closely associated with the decimal arrangement of upright stones on the Upper Side of the dancing-ground during High Maki and of the corresponding sacrificial stakes during Low Maki. It will be seen later how during High Maki each tenth stone may be furnished with a shrine.[8] In Atchin such an arrangement has been stabilised to the extent that the division of each village into Quarters has disappeared and has been replaced by a division into ten families, each

[1] Godefroy, 1, 1933, pp. 111-12.
[2] This of course only means that he exercises certain rights elsewhere exercised by the father.
[3] But see p. 127. The term of reference for the mother's brother in *soguk*.
[4] Godefroy, ibid. p. 109.
[5] Ibid. p. 111. [6] Ibid. p. 114. [7] See p. 284. [8] See p. 425.

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having its own Lodge and each being responsible for one shrine. This is in turn mirrored in mythology, in the persons of ten mythical brothers of whom many tales are told in Atchin and in many other parts of Malekula having a similar decimal division of society. These ten brothers in the mythology of Malekula replace the twelve brothers known in that of the Banks Islands, of whom the eldest was Qat.

In these mythological cycles it is sometimes the eldest brother who is the hero, but more often the youngest, by which means, since these tales are often very humorous and not too seriously taken, the natives compensate in imagination for the preponderating influence that the eldest brother exercises in actual life.[1] The same compensatory symbolism occurs also in mythical or semi-mythical accounts involving only two brothers, in which, as in the story of the foundation of the Vao village of Peter-ihi given on p. 79, it is more usually the younger brother who carries off the prize.

Eldest brother called "head of the yam," youngest "base of the yam."

It is thus not surprising to find that, as in our own society, there are special terms not only for the senior brother (the heir) but also for the junior brother (the cadet), though of the two it is only the eldest who is officially recognised in the social order, and the intermediate brothers of a large family are all classed together as an undifferentiated group.

In Vao a whole family of children is figuratively thought of as a yam (*ram*), since, like this staple article of food on which the life of the community primarily depends, it must be tended with great care and labour but amply repays the energy expended on it. Thus, the eldest son is called *bete-ram*, "head of the yam," the youngest is called *kere-ram*, "base of the yam," each of which terms is regarded as a single word and so not needing a definite article before the word *ram*, but all intermediate sons are lumped together and referred to by the phrase *lugha na-ram*, "middle of the yam," which, as it is a phrase and not one word, needs the insertion of the article *na-*.[2]

Office of "eldest son" a patrilineal institution which must be ritually conferred.

In spite of the strong matrilineal element in the kinship system, the title and office of the "eldest son" is, as with us, a patrilineal institution conferred on the eldest son of the father only, but not necessarily on that of the mother. Thus, if a man has two wives, whichever bears him a son first, that son will be the *bete-ram*; the first son of the second wife will no

[1] Compare also the marriage of Tikitikis with the younger of two sisters, recounted on p. 581.

[2] The corresponding terms in North Raga recorded by Rivers (1, vol. I, p. 196) are: eldest son, *tuagai* (allied to *tuaga*, term of respect throughout the New Hebrides, often used for "elder brother" (m.s.) or "elder sister" (w.s.); compare Vao *tutu*, *toghak*); youngest son, *vabwehui*; intermediate sons, *lologi*, meaning "middle."

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longer have any claim to the title. If, on the other hand, a woman bears a *bete-ram* to a man, and this man dies, and she marries a second husband to whom she bears his first son, then this boy is the second husband's *bete-ram*.

Though the position of the eldest son is in this respect similar to that occupied by the eldest son in our own aristocratic society, it differs from this in that in Vao *bete-ram* is an official title which, though unofficially applied from the moment of birth, does not become inalienable till the performance of a special rite called *va-vaghal-ean*, described below.[1] This constitutes the *bete-ram's* official dedication. Without this rite there can be no title. There is, however, always the possibility that if unduly delayed the eldest son will die before the rite has been performed. In this case the actual first-born will never become a *bete-ram* at all, and the rite will then be carried out for the father's second son, who will become the official *bete-ram*. If, on the other hand, the boy dies *after* the dedication rite, no subsequent son can achieve the title. The rite has been done once for all, and cannot be repeated. In this way the status of *bete-ram* differs from that of the European "heir," and it would almost seem as if in this respect the title had reference to a future life in which it is clear that no two people could hold the same position.

Eldest son (or daughter) may not be adopted.

As it affects this life and the social organisation of the island one notable result is that, among a people with whom adoption into another family is not uncommon, a *bete-ram* once dedicated as such may not be adopted.[2]

A man's eldest daughter is called *bete-ram vavine*, "female *bete-ram*," but this is, so far as I know, only a complimentary title entailing no dedication rite and no official rejoicings, though, like the male *bete-ram*, she also may not be adopted.

The Rites

(*a*) *At birth. Raiding the father's house.*

Though the official dedication of an eldest son does not occur till some time after birth, there is, however, a preliminary act of acclamation on the day when he is born, which takes the form of a wholesale raid on the father's premises. When the conch-shell trumpet is blown announcing that the child is a boy, if this boy is the father's eldest son all who hear it break into his house-enclosure, and even into his house (though not into that of the child's mother), and steal anything they can find. This is a recognised procedure with a special name called *ghoro ne-ime*, "raiding the house," and is done only in the case of an eldest son. Like many

[1] See p. 183. [2] See p. 188.